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- (54) Collapsible container
- (57) Containers 10 have a base 12 and four side walks 14 which may fold to a stowed or chilapsed position. Hunges connect each wall 14 to an intermediate.

migraber 16 which is clipped (preferably removably) to the base 12. Various interlocking formations 94, 98, 98, 40 silow confairners to stack securely whether collapsed

Description

The present invention relates to collapolible containers

Commens which can collabel to a more compact form when not in use are decrable for a number of situations, such as delivery of remail goods. Containers louded with retail goods can be transported to the retailist, empried, collapsed and then returned in their collabsed condition. This makes return transport easier by minimising the volume to be transported.

The invention provides a collapsible container comprising a base, at least one add wall which may move to a slowed position when the container is not in use, an intermediate member, hinge means connecting the intermediate member with a first one of the side wall and the base, and attachment means operable to attach the intermediate member to the second/one of the side wall and the base, the intermediate member and the said second one of the side wall and the base being manufactured separately, and subsequently assembled by means of the attachment means.

Prefamily the intermediate member extends along substantially the whole length of the cide walt. The intermediate member may be located below the lower 25 adgs of the aids wall, in use

The allachment means may comprise cooperating formations such as exoperating projections, and recesses. There may be detent means, preferably snap-together detent means, operable to retain the cooperating. formations together. The cooperating formations may be brought together by reoversions of a first type, and subsequently moved to a locked condition by movement of a second type. The first and second types of movemore may be movement in different, preferably perpendicular, directions. The cooperating formations may comprise a hook formation for introduction into a projection in a first direction, movement in a second direction serving to engage the hook with the walls of the recess. thereby locking the projection and recess together. The - 30 attachment means may be detachable. The attachment means may incorporate resilience for retaining the attechment means in the attached condition

The hings means may comprise a live hings

Pretorably the hirrye means connects the intermediate member with the side wall, and the satisfactorient means attached the intermediate member to the base

The base may have recilinear shape and the conlainer may complied four side walls as alcresaid, and corresponding intermediate members connected and attached as aforesaid. The walls may told over the base when the container is collapsed.

Protorably the container comprises stacking formations abis to interiork with corresponding formations on a like container when the containers are in the erect or collapsed condition, and are stacked one on the cihes, the stacked containers being substantially prevented from relative moyament by the interiorking of the stacking formations

The invention also provides a polisipaidle container comprising a base, side walls having an erect condition and a collapsed condition, the container further comprising stacking formations able to interlock with containers are in the erect or collapsed condition and are stacked one on the other the stacked containers being substantially prevented from relative movement by the interlocking of the stacking formations.

Preferably the side walls are connected to the base by hinge means. The side walls preferably he across the base when in the collapsed condition

The stacking formations may compuse projections and recesses. The stacking formations are preferably arranged to prevent containers sticing one on the other when stacked. The stacking tormations may comprise castellations along wall edges which are uppermost when the container is in the erect condition and/or castellations located along the lower face of the base and/or recesses or depressions in the lace and/or edges of the walls, the recesses or depressions being exposed from above when the container is in the collapsed condition, to receive castellations formed on the base of a like container.

Preferably the stacking formations allow containers to be stacked as alongsaid in a plurality of relative orientations, preferably orientations at right angles to each other.

The side walls may move to the collapsed condition when the container is not in use and the container may comprise an intermediate member, hinge means connecting the intermediate member with one of the side wall and the base, and affectment means operable to attach the intermediate member to the other of the side wall and the base, the intermediate member and the said other of the side wall and other of the side wall and other of the side wall and the base being manufactured separately and subsequently assembled by means of the affactment means

If will be apparent from the following description that the features of the first aspect of the invention set out spoke can be used along with the features of the second aspect of the invention as set out spoke, in various combinations.

Embodiments of the present invention will now be described in their defaul, by way of example only, and with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 is a schematic perspective view of two containers according to the inversion, being stacked in their erect condition;

Fig. 2 is a more schematic exploded view of one of the containers of Fig. 1:

Fig. 3 is a highly schematic perspective view of the container of Fig. 2 in the partially collapsed condition.

Fig. 4 is an exploded section along the line (V-IV in Fig. 2).

Fig. 5 shows the containers of Fig. 1 being stacked in the collapsed condition; and

Fig. 6 is a schemilic plan view of the stricking partern of the containers of Fig. 6.

Referring to the figures, there is shown in Fig. 1 two collapsible containers 10 each comprising a base 12, four side walls 14 which may fold to a stowed or collapsed position (shown in Fig. 5) when the container is not in use. Each side wall 14 is associated with an intermediate member 16. Hinge means connect (in this example) each intermediate member 16 with the corresponding side wall 14. Attachment means (to be described in relation to Fig. 2) attach the intermediate members 16 to the base 12. The intermediate members 16 and the base are manufactured separately and subsequently assembled by means of the attachment means to be described.

In more detail, each container 10 bes is generally rectangular base 12 from which the four eide waits 14 extend upwardly when the container is in the erect condition, to form a generally parallelepipedal container with an open top in the example shown which has a base of approximately 600mm x 400mm, one pair of opposed side waits is charter than the other pair of opposed side walls.

Each side wall is connected along its fower edge 16 to the corresponding intermediate member 16 which runs along the whole tength of the wall 14. The connection is by means of a "live" hings, that is, a thin web 19 (Fig. 4) of material connecting the wall 14 and member 16 and sufficiently thin to flex, allowing the wall 14 to hinge relative to the member 16. Preferably, the various components of the container are manufactured in a plantics material, preferably by injection moulding. The side wall and intermediate member can therefore be manufactured as a single element having much reduced thickness at the hinge 19.

When the container is in the erect condition, the side walls 14 stand on the intermediate members 16. However, the container 10 can be collepsed in the mainter indicated in Fig. 3. The two chorter walls 14 are first folded toward each other to be access the base 12. Fig. 3. shows the shorter walls fully loided to this stowed position. It is to be noted that the height of the intermediate morphore under the shorter walls is less than the height of the intermediate members under the longer walls so that in the position shown in Fig. 3, the upper face of the shorter walls is at or below the line of the hinges consecting the longer waite to their corresponding intermedistemembers. This allows the longer walls to be folded. toward ench other, down across the base and over the shorter walls. The container is then in the collapsed position shown in Fig. 5, which also shows additional features to be described below

The informerhable members 15 are attached to the base 12 by a series of recesses 20 and projections 22 shown in Figs. 2 and 4. Each projection 22 is generally U-shaped to form a book having a short downwardly extending limb 24 liniuhing at an abow 26, from which a generally horizontal and relatively long limb 28 extends away parallel to the length of the member 16.

The recesses 20 are generally rectangular and aligned parallel with the intermediate members 16. Their length corresponds with the length of the timb 28. This allows the members 16 to be lowered to introduce the limbs 28 into the recesses 20, whereupon the members 16 can be sid sideways parallel to the length of the members 16, to hook the long limbs 28 under corresponding surfaces 30 (Fig. 4) within the recesses 20. Alternatively, the second movement could be in a different direction, such as twisting

There are preferably determineans associated with the recessor and projections to hold them together once connected. These may be permanent, but are preferably reteneable to allow an intermediate member 16 to be removed by reversing the sequence of operations described above. This allows an intermediate member 16 and the corresponding side wall 14 to be removed and replaced for metanice to repair damage.

Arrangements for holding the intermediate member 16 and base 12 together may be resilient as indicated in Fig. 2, in which a small resilient upstand 32 projects above the surface of the base 12, to be pushed down when the intermediate member 16 is lowered into position. The resilience of the upstand 32 causes it to push the intermediate members 16 upwardly after connection to the base, thereby increasing friction between the limits 26 and surfaces 30, to hold the intermediate member 16 in position on the base 12.

Many other types of conflection arrangement could be used to securely connect the informediate members 16 to the base 12. Other types of hinge could also be used. In the example described above, it is preferred to provide the hinge between the intermediate member 16 and the side wall 14, with the attachments between the members 16 and the base 12 being detachable. However, it may an eomocircumstances be adventageous to provide the hinge between the member 16 and the base 12, with the members 16 and the corresponding walls 14 being attached by an arrangement similar to that shown, or any of the attached.

The oblitations shown in the drewings also monporate a number of features which action stamon; As has been described, the containers have a bose 12 and aide walls 14 with an ereor condition and a colleged condition. The container 10 further comprises stacking formations 34,36,38 and 40. Firstly this glob walls 14 have top edges (when even) which are castellated to form noteness 34. These overtile downward projections 36 from the base 12 on that a container base can be cracked on a container balow when the lower container is in the ereor

condition, by lowering the base of the upper container at in the holden. 34 in the induction 36 on the upper container at in the holden. 34 in the induction 56 then engage to stop the upper container 36 and projections 36 then engage to stop the upper container stiding relative to the lower container. This assists secure stacting, One arrangement uses projections 36 which tit closely in corresponding notches 34. Alternatively projections 36 could be shorter than the notches 34, so that one notch 34 prevents sliding in one-direction, with another notch preventing sixting in the opposite direction.

In the arrangements shown, the locations of the notches 34 and projections 36 also allows containers to be stacked when rotated through 90°, there being three notches 34 and projections 36 along each longer side of the rectangular container, and two notches 34 and two projections 36 along each shorter side. When stacked in this way, the upper container will overhang the lower container by approximately one third of its length.

Secure stacking in which relative stiding is prevented can also be achieved when the lower container is in the collegeed condition. This is illustrated in Fig. 5. Two containers are shown there, both collapsed. Depres sions 39 tarmed in the face of the aide walls 14 new face. apwardly by virtue of the collapsed condition of the containers. In addition, notches 40 around the edges of the walls 14, including notches slong the edge 18, become exposed when the container is collegeed. The arrangement and form of these depressions and notches alkake. them to receive the projections 38 fears a like container stacked from above. The arrangement allows stacking two containers in alignment, or at right angles to one another (as shown). When stacked as right angles, two projections 36 at the short side of the base 12 sit in two notches 40 at the lower edge of a longer wall 14 of the lower container, leaving a third notch 40 unoccupied. Two projections 36 on the base of the upper container sil in depressions 38, one in each of the longer walls 14 of the lower container. Another two projections 36 (obscured in Fig. 5) sit in notches at the obscured end of the walls 14. A corresponding two notches 40 at the visible end are unoccupied

The spacing and sizes of the notches 34, projections 36, depressions 38, and notches 40 locate the upper container on the lower container to stop the stacked containers sliding relative to each other.

The ability to stack collapsed containers at right angles to one another facilitates the creation of a stable stack as will now be described with reference to Fig. 6. First, it should be noted that the depressions 38 are relatively wide, and allow two projections 36 to be located in them, side by side, one from each of two containers being stacked side-by-side on the same lower container.

Turning to Fig. 6, a layer in a stack of collapsed conteiners is formed by tive containers arranged as indicated by the solid lines. Thren containers 50 have their long sides adjected and incir chort sides aligned. Two more containers 52 arc at right angles to the containers 50 with chorter sides abolting and longer sides adjacent the shorter sides of the containers 50. Fig. 6 also indicates the arrangement on the layer beneath, using broken tries it can be seen that the arrangement is the same except that the whole layer has been related through a half turn. This results in every container everlying at least two consumers on the layer below which, by virtue of the interconnecting notches, projections and depressions, yields a secure stack along the building of brickwork.

Containers of 600mm x 400mm base can be stacked in the manner shown on a standard size patter. Similar overlapping stacking arrangements can be devised for other container sizes, such as 400mm x 800mm, again with similar advantages. The layout of the meriooking formations for the erect and collapsed containers would vary according to the size of container.

if will be apparent from the above description that many variations and modifications can be made without departing from the scope of the present invention, in particular, many different sizes of container could be designed, with corresponding arrangements of interlocking formations. Other hings techniques could be used, as could alternative arrangements for attaching the intermediate members to the base. Alternatively, the intermediate members and the base could be hinged, with the wall being made separately. The containers have been discribed as being of plastics material, but other materials could be used. Look arrangements could be incorporated to bold the continuer walls in the crept position.

Whitst encloavouring in the foregoing specification to draw attention to those features of the invention believed to be of particular importance it should be understood that the Applicant claims protection in respect of any patentable feature or combination of features heresinbefore referred to and/or shown in the drawings whether or not particular amphasis has been placed thereon.

Claims

- 1. A collapsible container comprising a base, at least one side wall which may move to a stowed position when the containor is not in use, an intermediate member, hingo means connecting the intermediate member with a first one of the side wall and the base, and affactment means operable to attach the informediate member to the second one of the side wall and the base, the intermediate member and the each second second one of the side wall and the base, the intermediate member and the each second second one of the side wall and the base being manufactured separately, and subsequently assembled by means of the attachment means.
- A container according to claim 1, whem in the intermediate member extends along autostantially the

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whole length of the side wall,

- A container according to claim 1 or 2, whereis the intermodule member is located below the lower odge of the side walf, in use
- A container according to claim 1, 2 or 3, wherein the attachment means comprise cooperating formations such as cooperating projections and recosor.
- A container scorording to claim 4, further comprising detert means operable to retain the operating formations togother
- A containor according to cleam 5, wherein the detent means apap together
- 7 A contentor according to claim 4, 5 or 6, wherein the cooperating formations are ungageable by movement of a hirst type, and subsequently moveble to a focked condition by movement of a second type.
- A container according to drain 7, wherein the first and second types of movement are different.
- A nomain or according to claim 8, wherein the dillegent directions are perpendicular.
- 16. A container according to say of claims 4 to 9, wherein the opoperating formalions compuse a trock formation for introduction are a projection in a first direction, movement in a second distance serving to impage this heak with the walls of the rocess, thereby locking the projection and rocess together.
- 3) A continuo according to my proceeding chiles, wherein the alternatureal means are designable.
- 12 A container arranding to any paraginage classiwholein the affectment means incorporate resiliance for retaining the affectment means in the attached contain.
- A continued according to any preceding claim, wherein the hinge means comprise a available.
- 14. A container according to any preceding claim, wherein this image means currents the intensectate member with the side well, and the attendment means attaches the intermediate member to the base.
- 15. A container according to any preceding claim, wherein the base has rectilined shape and the container comprises four side wells as aforecaid, and corresponding interestigate members connected and relational size aforesaid.

- A container according to any preceding course, wherein the walks told over the base when the reatainer to dollapsed.
- 17. A container amortising to any preceding claim wherein the container comprises triscking to nations able to interlock with corresponding formations on a like container when the containers are in the most or collapsed condition and are stanked one on the otten, the clark-od containers being sall standard provened from teletive movement by the interlocking of the interlooking formations.
- 18. A collapsible container comprising a bace, side well-baving an erect condition and a collapsiad condition, the container further comprising stacking formations able to inferious with corresponding formations on a line container when the containers are in the erect or collapsied condition and are elacked one on the other, the stacked correspond to the interiooking of the stacking formations.
 - A container recording to claim 18, wherein the side walls are connected to the base by hinge means
 - A confarrer according to claim 18 or 19, wherein the side walls lie across the base when in the collapsed condition
 - A container seconding to claim 18, 19 or 20, wherein the stacking formations comprise projections and recesses.
- 25 22. A container according to any of claims 18 to 21, wherein the emoking formations are transped to provent continuous disting one on the other when stroked.
- 49 23. A container amountary to any of claims. Iff to 20 whereas the stroking formulars compact contests when the container is in the erect pondition.
- 45 24. A container according to any of claims 18 to 23, wherein the stacking formations complise castellations located along the lower tace of the base.
 - 28. A continuor according to very of classes 18 to 24, wherein the etacking formations comprise recesses or depressions in the face and/or edges of the wells.
 - 26. A portious topologing to may of claims 23 to 25, wherein the recesses or depressions are exposed from above when the container is in the collaboral condition, to receive castellations formed on the base of a like consumer.

27 A comminer according to any of claims, 18 to 25, wherein the standing formations allow containers to be stacked as alonosaid in a plurality of relative orderlations.

28. A portainer according to claim 27, wherein the onentiations are at right angles to each other.

- 29. A container according to any of claims 18 to 28, wherein the cide walls are movable to the collapsed of condition when the container is not in use.
- 30. A container according to any of claims 18 to 19, comprising an inferrodiate member, hinge means connecting the animal value member, hinge means connecting the animal value member of the 15 side wait and the brack, and attachment means operable to attach the intermodiate member to the other of the tide wait and the base, the infermodiate member and the said other of the sale wait and the base being member tend reparately and subsequently assembled by there is a time attachment means.
- A container according to any of claims 16 to 30 and any of claims 1 to 17
- A container substantially as described above, was reference to the accompanying drawings.
- 33. Any nevel subject marker or combination including novel subject marker disclosied, whether or not written the scope of or relating to the same inversion as any of the preceding claims.

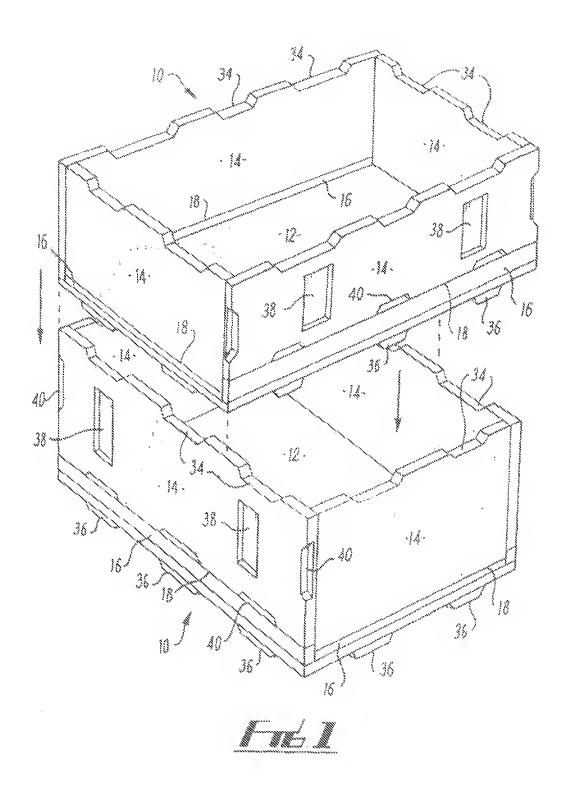
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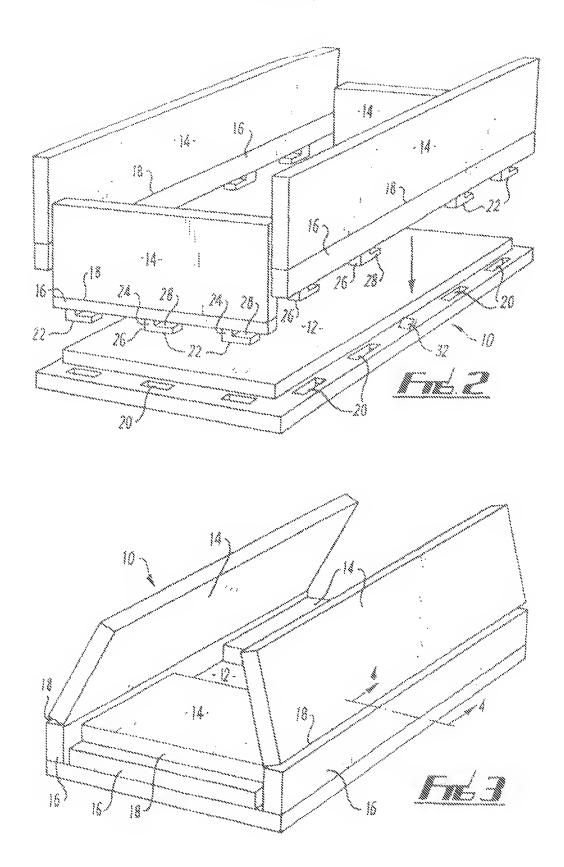
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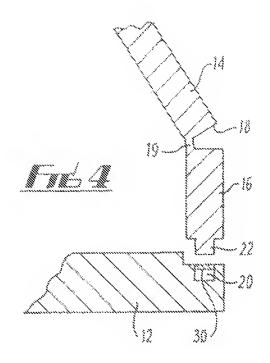
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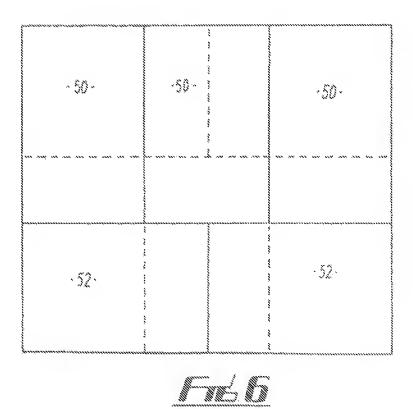
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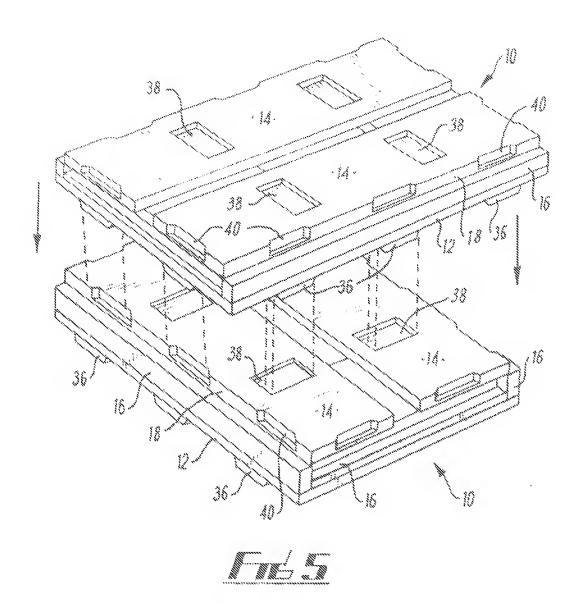
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(54) Collapsible container

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PARTIAL EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number

which under Rule 45 of the European Patent Correction CF 96-30-5602 shall be considered, for the purposes at subsequent priceedings, as the Surpress search report

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	* figures 2,3,16 *		4-16	
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SUPPLEMENTAL SHEET - C -

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- A collapsible container characterised by the attachment means between its walls and its bottom (claims 1 to 16); and
- A collapsible container characterised by stacking means (claims 17 to 31).

Non-unity of invention appears both a prior and a posterior.

A priori:

Independent claims 1 and 18 have in common the following features: a collapsible container comprising a base and at least one side wall movable to a collapsed position. These common leatures are well known and therefore cannot be considered as the "special technical features" referred to in Fula 30(1) EFC. Therefore, there is no unity of invention between the subject-matter of claims 1 to 17 on one hand and 18 to 30 on the other hand.

A posteriori:

The features common to any of dependent claims 2 to 15 on one hand and any of dependent claims 17 and 31 on the other hand are the features of claim 1. However, these features are not new, as can be seen in the search report. Thus they cannot be considered as "special technical features". Therefore, there is no unity of invention between the subject-matter of claims 2 to 16 on one hand and claims 17 and 31 on the other hand.

The partial search report has been drawn up for the subject-matter of claims 1 to 16.